



The India Connection

With help from OSU and local business leaders, central Ohio's thriving Indian community stands to become even more significant.



By KITTY McCONNELL
+ Photos by TIM JOHNSON

The temperature in Mumbai, home to the largest Arabian Sea port in western India, ranges from the mid-50s to the upper 90s year-round.

For Mumbai native Vinita Bahri-Mehra, leaving that coastal climate for sub-zero Ohio winters remains the single drawback of her move to Columbus in 2002.

"If you set the weather aside and the snow that we get, I think this is a great place to live. That's what most of the Indian community believes," says Bahri-Mehra with a laugh. She is the Asia-Pacific Team Leader and a director based in the Columbus law office of Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter. She counsels US and non-US companies in global business matters. Projects

related to India including acquisitions, joint ventures and IP licensing are roughly 65 percent of her work. Licensed to practice in both Ohio and India, Bahri-Mehra sees the growing interconnection between India and the US, Ohio and the Columbus region.

"The job opportunities that Ohio has to offer are helping the Indians who come here achieve the American dream," she says. Indians comprise half of Ohio's Asian-American labor force, which is two percent of the state's total workforce, says Bahri-Mehra. Ohio is attracting high-skilled Indian workers primarily in IT and healthcare.

"Some of the top companies, look at their IT teams: The majority of their workforce will be Indians who are here on green cards or Indians who came here on H-1B (the federal employment visa) or Indians who stayed and became citizens," says Bahri-Mehra, pointing to Nationwide, Cardinal Health and Chase as examples.

Ohio State University is a "good feeder for the immigrant community that comes" to Columbus, functioning



Vinita Bahri-Mehra

Kegler Brown's Asia-Pacific Team leader sees increasing alignment between business interests in Ohio and India.

4th

largest global economy

7.5%

GDP growth for FY 2015-16

World's largest democracy with a consumer base of **1.2 billion**

Home to R&D facilities of **100 companies** in the US Fortune 500

\$24.3 b

foreign direct investment attracted to India in 2014

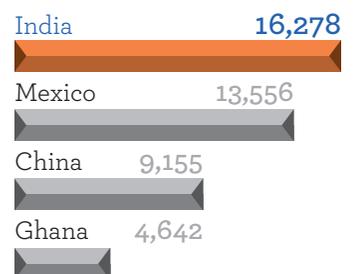
80%

Ohio's Indian community growth since 2000

265k+

Asian-Americans living and working in Ohio

Top countries of birth for Columbus metro residents, 2012*



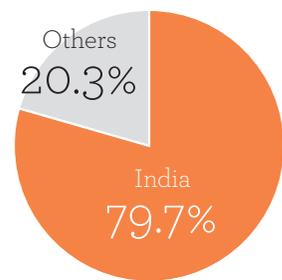
*Somalia would likely rank 3rd or 4th if all countries were listed individually in this US Census Bureau reporting.

India is the **8th fastest growing source** of foreign direct investment in the US

13th in US: Ohio companies and organizations filed an average **11,637** labor condition applications for H-1B visas in 2014

27th among US cities: Columbus companies and organizations filed an average **2,614** labor condition applications for H-1B visas in 2014 for jobs with an average salary of **\$75,509**

India is on top for new **EB green card holders** in Greater Columbus



* 2012

International college students and their families contribute **\$250 million** to the local economy yearly

as an “Indian talent pipeline” for Ohio, says Bahri-Mehra.

South and Central Asian households in Columbus earn an average of \$88,000, the highest median annual income of the city’s foreign-born residents, according to the Columbus Council on World Affairs’ 2014-15 Global Report. Affordable housing in high-performing suburban school districts appeal to Indians who may have heard of Columbus through friends and family living here.

“The Indian community is so close-knit, there are definitely word-of-mouth references....As a community I think we’re very good ambassadors of where we live,” says Bahri-Mehra. Columbus is home to 24,000 Indian families, she says, all of whom are part of and draw from a strong local support system. She estimates there are at least four temples, 24 Indian restaurants and seven dedicated Indian grocers which rely upon dollars spent by the Indian community.

“There is a pretty robust Indian community (here) which is self-sustaining,” says Bahri-Mehra. India is the top country of birth for Columbus’ foreign-born population, and Ohio’s Indian community has grown by 80 percent since 2000, according to state data and CCWA.

Aside from milder winters, these residents would also like to see more connectivity to India by air. This spring, Kegler Brown hosted an Indian trade delegation in Columbus. Among their guests were the Consul General of India in New York and the CEO of Air India, India’s largest public airline and the main carrier from the US to India.

“In every meeting he went where there was a sizable Indian community, the only question he got was, ‘Will we ever have a direct flight from Columbus to India?’” says Bahri-Mehra.

India is the fifth-largest international destination from Port Columbus with 43 passengers a day each way, according to the Columbus Regional Airport Authority. (China, meanwhile, has 36 daily passengers.) Hyderabad is the largest Indian destination for Port Columbus travelers, followed by Mumbai and Chennai, New Delhi and Bengaluru. Port Columbus travelers fly on United—the only American carrier with nonstop service to India, which flies out of Newark, NJ—or on Air India flights out of Newark, JFK or Chicago airports.

Demand for travel to India in and out of Port Columbus is up 39 percent from 2009, says David Whitaker, vice president of business development and communications at the airport authority. Still, that’s not nearly the capacity needed to develop a direct flight to India from Columbus.

“Daily demand in the neighborhood of about 300 passengers a day each way would

probably be necessary to start a quality conversation about that,” says Whitaker. Indian travel is a driver in discussions on the development of Port Columbus nonstop flights to Europe, since most travelers get to India via European routes, says Whitaker. “It’s an important market. We deeply value it.”

Sister Cities & Market Potential

In 2008, Columbus made an important connection to India through the Greater Columbus Sister Cities Program. With insight from leaders in central Ohio’s Indian community, Columbus became the first sister city for Ahmedabad in the Indian state of Gujarat.

“It was really great foresight on the part of Columbus Sister Cities and Mayor Coleman to identify Ahmedabad to be a sister city,” says Bahri-Mehri, who joined the board in 2010.

According to Columbus Sister Cities, the relationship with Ahmedabad “began as a business venture but soon fostered diplomatic and cultural ties... ties enhanced by the large Indian population in Columbus.” Ahmedabad sent a business delegation to represent the sister city for Columbus’ bicentennial celebration in 2012.

“It’s a very important thing that we are sister cities with a city from which the Prime Minister comes from. Ahmedabad is one of the most forward-thinking cities in terms of the investments and the projects they do,” says Bahri-Mehri, referring to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

At the time Columbus and Ahmedabad became sister cities, Modi was chief minister of the west-Indian state of Gujarat. He won the biggest electoral victory in 30 years for any Indian party, according to the BBC. His swearing in as PM in May 2014 revitalized diplomatic and commercial relations between the US and India. A US-India Summit in Washington in September 2014 was followed by President Obama’s visit for India’s 66th Republic Day celebration on Jan. 16.

In an address to the US-India Business Council in New Dehli, the President called the countries’ fortunes “inextricably linked” with shared goals for “greater trade, investment and economic partnership.”

Prime Minister Modi is viewed favorably by many, including professionals in central Ohio, as implementing pro-capitalist reforms while maintaining India’s social support policies.

Trade between the US and India has increased by 60 percent over the last few years, up to \$100 billion annually, according to the White House. In comparison to \$560 billion in annual trade with China, there’s room for

US companies to grow in the Indian market and vice versa. India holds tremendous potential for infrastructure and sustainable energy development, broadband deployment and manufacturing growth, healthcare outreach and workforce education.

During his visit, President Obama announced \$1 billion in funding for Made-In-America exports to India. He also announced the India Diaspora Investment Initiative, which will allow Indian-Americans to provide “financing for Indian businesses that are investing in non-traditional” markets such as rural healthcare and basic infrastructure.

All of this is welcome news for Ohio. India is Ohio’s 22nd largest international export market with \$1.326 billion in exports from 2012-14, according to the Ohio Development Services Agency’s 2014 Ohio Exports Report. Ohio holds a 1.8-percent share of all US exports to India. Bahri-Mehra projects continued growth for Ohio companies who take advantage of Modi’s business-friendly reforms.

“Customers in India want American high-technology, high-value products,” says Bahri-Mehra. Indians who live, work and own businesses here are a strong source of revenue for India: 17.2 percent of remittances to India come from the US, second among all countries with Indian-born populations, according to the Brookings Institution.

In the Columbus metro area, more employment-based green card holders come from India than all other countries combined, according to CCWA.

Prime Minister Modi is drawing from that diaspora to see “how those resources could be

leveraged for a win-win relationship,” says Dr. Chandan Sen, associate dean for research at OSU Wexner Medical Center, executive director of OSU’s comprehensive wound center and director of OSU’s Center for Regenerative Medicine & Cell Based Therapies. He also directs the medical center’s Technology Commercialization and Industry Partnership program.

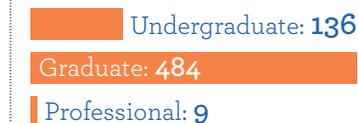
“Prime Minister Modi recognizes that a big fraction of Indian productivity actually happens in the United States,” says Sen. He recently chaired the H3C Health Sciences Innovation Conference. Presented last January in Mumbai by the Ohio State University and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, H3C exemplifies the high-level international partnerships being formed by central Ohio’s Indian-born professionals.

“With (Modi’s) mandate in place, the doors opened much faster for us,” he says of organizing H3C. Sen is an old friend and colleague of the director of AIIMS, India’s national network of comprehensive care centers, research facilities and academic institutions. “These types of international events are best done by leveraging the people like me that are already here that are well-connected with the system in India and can muster support.”

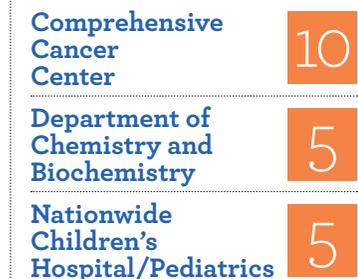
Sen is on the board of the OSU’s International Gateway Office in India, which facilitated the conference in collaboration with the OSU Wexner Medical Center. Utilizing connections developed through the India Gateway office, conference committees had access to the highest Indian authorities. India’s health minister, the US General Consulate and

OSU is **16th** among US colleges for international students

Students from India at OSU (Autumn 2014)



Top three departments for OSU’s 61 J-1 scholars from India:



(Sources: Brookings Institution; Ohio Development Services Agency; Columbus Council on World Affairs 2014-15 Global Report; Ohio State University; Kegler, Brown, Hill + Ritter; MyVisaJobs.com)

Asian-American Commerce in Central Ohio

In 1993, the Asian-American business owners in the Columbus area banded together to earn a place in the city’s minority business program. Proprietors of Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, Korean and other Asian backgrounds joined forces to advance Asian-American business interests in Ohio and abroad.

“We lobbied the city of Columbus to include Asians as a minority group,” says Asian-American Commerce Group Board President Shyam Rajadhyaksha, vice president and corporate secretary of Columbus-based DLZ. “We serve as a liaison between Asian-

owned businesses, city government and Fortune 500 companies. A lot of these programs have supplier diversity programs,” says Rajadhyaksha. “We connect them to our members.”

No single ethnicity or national background dominates its board membership.

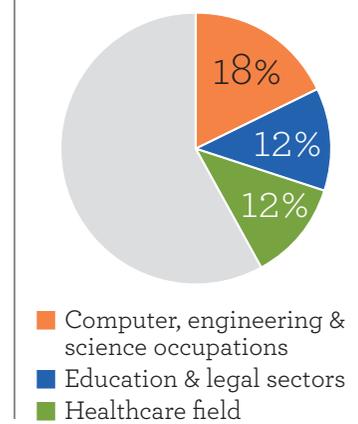
The 18,000 Asian-American owned businesses in the state account for \$6.8 billion in receipts, according to data from the state development office report on Ohio’s Asian-American population. The high-growth Chinese and Indian markets hold promise for Asian-American businesses.

That will surely be a topic of

discussion at the 2015 Ohio Asian Awards on Aug. 22 at Hollywood Casino Columbus. The AACG will recognize local leaders and organizations for their contributions to Asian-American’s success. Categories include: business entrepreneur, business leader, community leader, elected leader, healthcare leader, lifetime achievement, leader in media, philanthropist leader, restaurant/hospitality leader, supplier diversity and technology leader.

Six hundred guests are expected to attend. Nominations, tickets and sponsorship packages are available to the public at OhioAsianAwards.com.

Ohio’s **106,000** employed Asian-Americans work in:





Mohan Viddam

left India 35 years ago with one suitcase. After earning his first master's degree in animal science at Kansas State University, Viddam planned to return to India and pursue a career in organic farming. He became fascinated with computers while writing his thesis, however. Instead of returning to India, he enrolled in the University of South Carolina for his master's in computer science.

Viddam worked for AT&T Bell Labs in Columbus for over a decade. In 1992 he founded Dublin-based Halcyon Technology Solutions, an IT consulting firm which develops Microsoft solutions and licensed software.

Today, Halcyon employs 145 full-time and contract staffers. Viddam, Halcyon's chairman and CEO, and Halcyon President Sanjay Dudaney were awarded the 2015 Small Business Leader Award by the Columbus Chamber.

Viddam's success is overshadowed only by his commitment to public service in Ohio and in India. Viddam works with the Dublin AM Rotary Club to distribute free water backpacks to villagers in India. They distributed 300 in 2014.

Through Halcyon, Viddam operates an independent veterans training program. His no-cost, job-ready software testing course has been helping Ohio veterans develop workforce skills since 2011. The program has a 65-70 percent job placement rate.

"I'm very grateful, literally living the American dream. I always wanted to give back," says Viddam. "I'm using my company as a vehicle to do this kind of social work. I'm able to combine both of them—to grow the profitable side of the business and give back."

the mayor of Mumbai all helped broaden the mission and coverage of the medical conference. OSU alumni in India helped organize and stage the conference. OSU President Michael Drake gave the opening remarks.

"I also draw from all the contacts of all the Indians who reside in Ohio...Politically there are so many people who have so many connections," says Sen. H3C received support from everyone from the federal government to the Franklin County Commissioners.

H3C stands for career, care and commerce. "We had here government, academia and commerce," says Sen. "Unless we have that continuum from science to policy through commerce, we will not be achieving the end goal we set for ourselves."

In India, the goal is taking sustainable healthcare to a patient base of over a billion people. "People are craving healthcare support," says Sen.

"Companies in the US that fund us have a goal of getting into the Indian market and they don't know how," says Sen. "Industry that supports research within Ohio State, if they wanted to go to India, we would open the door for them. That would be added value."

Initiatives like H3C taking place at OSU and in the Columbus region are about more than "getting a few dollars," says Sen. "It's about bringing all these entities into one continuum so they all work hand-in-hand to achieve this one goal, which is more productivity in the state of Ohio."

Gateway to Commerce & Cooperation

Ohio State is a conduit for many international research and commercial partnerships forming with India. OSU's India Gateway office in Nariman Point (a central business district in Mumbai) is the hub for students, faculty and alumni in India. Since opening in March of 2012, the India Gateway has been critical in securing high-profile grants and partnerships for Ohio State.

OSU opened its first Global Gateway office in Shanghai, China, in 2010. In 2014, a third office opened in Sao Paulo, Brazil. OSU's three Gateway offices function as mini-embassies, facilitating strategic interactions between university stakeholders and key players in the world's top emerging markets.

The India Gateway's first office space was donated by an Indian businessman and OSU alumnus. Organizations like the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin of Central Ohio, which raised \$42,000 to support the India Gateway opening, have been instrumental in its success.

"We're talking about mutually beneficial partnerships (for) the university, the state of Ohio, the central Ohio region and certainly India. It's alums who have opened these doors," says William Brustein, vice provost for global strategies and international affairs at OSU.

Ohio State was recently successful in winning the bid to run the US State Department's Passport to India Initiative. Through the Passport program, Ohio State and its India Gateway are the principle facilitators for US internships and study abroad programs.

"The Gateway was (also) instrumental in helping our faculty, in partnership with Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh, to win the prestigious Obama-Singh grant," says Brustein. Obama-Singh 21st Century Knowledge Initiative grants are awarded from a \$10-million joint fund established two years ago by the US and Indian governments to support academic partnerships between the nations. OSU was awarded \$250,000 to launch a pilot project at AMU to train the next generation of STEM educators in India.

These partnerships wouldn't have been possible without the research and international connections of OSU faculty. Department of Astronomy Professor Anil Pradhan will lead the program at AMU, where he is a co-director.

"Faculty or alumni can open doors, they can make introductions. They often have some kind of strategic insight about the direction a company is headed," says Ramesh Bhattacharya, director of OSU's Global Gateway office in India. The India Gateway has chapters in Bengaluru, New Delhi and Mumbai where its office is located; those cities have the highest concentration of Ohio State alumni in India.

"We can work with alumni and faculty to develop a trustworthy relationship where we can learn where the strategic overlaps are," says Bhattacharya. The need for skilled workers in India presents an opportunity for OSU.

Usha Menon, vice dean of OSU's College of Nursing, and Tim Raderstorf, a clinical instructor at the nursing college and director of the Academy or Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, are working with the India Gateway to develop health worker training, cervical cancer research and tuberculosis diagnostics partnerships.

"They are looking to skill-up 55 million laborers in India by 2020. That's not just within healthcare. That includes textiles and various other areas" says Raderstorf.

Menon and Raderstorf believe OSU's College of Nursing can have a lasting impact on India's healthcare industry through nursing curricula development and training at Indian institutions.



Dr. Chandan Sen

chaired the H3C Conference in Mumbai

There are no advanced-practice nursing roles in India, though the informal role nursing plays in India's rural communities is almost larger than in the US, says Menon. The nursing college has set a goal in its five-year strategic plan to be among the top 20 recipients of National Institutes of Health funding.

Being able to work with Indian partners opens avenues for research in critical healthcare areas. For example, Indian women account for 25 percent of all cervical cancer deaths. "For our faculty to be able to do research in this area has a high potential for huge impact," says Menon. "It allows us to partner and write grant proposals not only to the NIH but to organizations like the Gates Foundation."

The college is working with two large Indian companies and one US company to see what lessons from America's healthcare education system and the nursing profession will be of use in the Indian market.

"There's an opportunity for some type of global healthcare entrepreneurship," says Raderstorf. "We hope that through these relationships that we're building, we're going to be able to foster that within our students as well and help them see how we can develop businesses abroad."

Ohio State's Institute for Materials Research also operates in a space of high strategic value to Indian industry. IMR focuses on the "engineering of electronic materials, nanostructures and devices that will impact alternative energy, electronics, photonics and sensing technologies." Steven Ringel, executive director of the Institute, is leading an OSU Discovery Theme initiative on materials and manufacturing innovations for sustain-

ability. Ringel traveled to India two years ago to promote OSU's research in sustainable manufacturing and materials with the help of the India Gateway office.

"Through that conduit, I was able to access a wide range of business leaders, C-level executives at a variety of companies, as well as some leading Indian universities," says Ringel. He visited Indian multinational manufacturers including Larsen & Toubro, multiple Tata Group companies and Mahindra Motors, one of the world's largest automotive concerns.

In 2014, Ohio State University ranked fourth in the nation for industry-sponsored research. Without industry-sponsored research and partnerships, it would be virtually impossible to deploy the research being carried out at IMR. The institute partners with a long list of Ohio engineering and manufacturing companies and organizations, including Honda, the NASA Glenn Research Center, L-3 Cincinnati Electronics and GE.

In late June, Ringel hosted an IMR workshop with the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, whose leaders have been visiting OSU for the past year. Ringel hopes to support multiple projects between OSU and IIT, India's top technology university, as a result of the workshop.

"My personal view is that those projects must be things that can ultimately connect multinational industrial bases. The connection of Ohio industry to Indian industry mediated through Ohio State is the path that we're taking."

Art Director Yogesh Chaudhary contributed to this story. Kitty McConnell is assistant editor.

Vikram Rajadhyaksha

began his studies at the Indian Institute of Technology, where he earned a BS in civil engineering. He came to Ohio for graduate studies in geotechnical engineering at the University of Cincinnati. In 1978, he founded DLZ.

Today, the Columbus-based engineering, architectural and surveying firm has over 600 employees in 20 offices and generated over \$100 million in revenue in 2013.

In 1994, DLZ launched the India Hydropower Development Company in an international partnership with Infrastructure India. "We own six small hydropower plants totaling about 60 megawatts" in India, says Rajadhyaksha. A seventh plant is under construction. "So far, so good."

In 2010, the DLZ Hydrokinetic Company opened for business and installed India's first hydrokinetic turbine. Rajadhyaksha says India's demand for power is growing, as is the country's GDP. "There is money to be made."

Purba Majumder

graduated from the University of Calcutta with a degree in geography and a full-ride scholarship at the University of Toledo.

By 2001, she was a vice president for JPMorgan Chase in Columbus. She left Chase to co-found the Columbus-based technology solutions firm Cybervation, where she is president.

In 2013, Majumder founded CoolTechGirls to interest young women in the wider central Ohio community in science, technology, math and engineering. CoolTechGirls is a joint initiative between Cybervation, the City of Dublin and Dublin Entrepreneurial Center. Columbus area businesses and organizations including Cardinal Health, HMB and the Girl Scouts of Ohio's Heartland Council have staged CoolTechGirls events.

In India, girls and boys are both strongly encouraged to pursue STEM professions, she says. "This is where the jobs are, so we should expose our kids to those fields."